

Local Business

Mayo doctor's Muve moves on to Minnesota Cup

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By Jeff Kiger

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A \$25,000 financial boost coupled with the affirmation of winning a statewide business competition gave Dr. James Levine's anti-obesity company called Muve Inc. some momentum Thursday night

Muve, a company formed by the Mayo Clinic doctor and researcher to create devices and products to combat the obesity epidemic, won the annual Minnesota Cup entrepreneur competition. It came out on top over 500 aspiring businesses.

Standing with Levine at the Minnesota Cup announcement was John Montague, the recently formed company's chief executive officer.

"It was an awesome night," Montague said. The duo made a final 15-minute presentation Thursday to judges, as did four other companies in the finals.

"Afterwards, we were told by several of the judges that we were in a category by ourselves, which is nothing short of amazing," he says. "I think the chemistry between Dr. Jim Levine as a passionate scientist and myself as a proven entrepreneur was pretty incredible."

Adding the effect of the final presentation was Levine's decision to wear an early active recording device to the event. Mayo Clinic eventually designed a small device to replace the bulky, full-body garment.

One of Muve's goals is to produce a small digital device called Gruve that records a person's every movement and calculates how many calories are burned. The Gruve device and related online communities are just the start. Treadmill desks, a fitness book, clothing, branded bottled water, nutritional supplements and health consulting are also part of the vision.

Now the next step for the company is to open a Minneapolis office in October then "start raising capital and developing products and services," Montague said.

Muve's business plan calls for first raising \$500,000 to begin development of hardware and software. In early 2008, the plan is to raise an additional \$2 million to complete the development and testing.

To bring products to market by early 2009, an estimated \$5 million more will be needed.

While the business office will be in Minneapolis, Muve is also planning to open a research and development facility called an active life center in Rochester. No timeline is set for its opening.

Montague describes the center as an R&D lab "that is educational and yet creative and fun for the public."

He anticipates public events, seminars and kids events at the center paired with the corporate research.

Reaching people and getting them moving is the whole point of Muve. That has Montague and Levine thinking big.

"We think that really to achieve the big dream and reach millions of people ... and change the modern lifestyle that we will need tremendous promotional efforts," Montague says.

One such method in the planning stages is an expedition where Levine would lead 100 obese people in a climb in September of 2008 to the top of the 19,000-foot Mount Kilimanjaro in Tanzania.

While nothing is set, talks are in the works with a number of production interests about either filming the event to be aired in episodes such as on a reality TV show or as a documentary.

"No matter what, it will definitely be filmed," he says.

The ABC News television show "20/20" is also filming a research study to be broadcast, possibly yet this year, on the show. A book by the two founders called "Stand up! for a healthier life and happier life" will be published in the spring of 2009.

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